

## Incorporating Hymns, Psalms, and Song Paraphrases In Adult Faith Formation

Music has the ability and power to transform God's word, both written and spoken. The right music can alter and open the door for participants to connect to the lesson of the day in many different ways. Just as spices: onions, garlic, thyme, and parsley can transform a recipe, so can music and hymns. Music, through its combinations of pitch and rhythmic values, can unlock human emotion and spiritual thought within moments. God has given us an abundant resource through the hymnals faithfully and diligently crafted over the years. These resources, and specifically *Glory to God*, has an introduction where its desire is to "serve as an instrument of God's grace" and notes that: "the familiar songs will sing anew" and "the new songs will speak truth."

Theology and music are intertwined and support one another. They challenge our congregations, and help us proclaim, respond, and teach the Word in different formats. Many church goers can audiate Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound, Great is Thy Faithfulness, or Here I Am, Lord. As soon as that process begins, people are transported back into memories, wonder, and discover how hymns are still relevant in life today. This can reinforce teaching the faith through different avenues. Teachers in public and private schools are challenged to provide students with different ways to learn sometimes employing learning mnemonics such as "Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge" to aid in memorizing or singing the entire alphabet to a rhyming tune for example. Faith leaders can consider similar ideas.

Don Saliers writes in *Music and Theology* "How Great Thou Art' expressed, for many, their very experience of God in awe and wonder. For others, the classical hymn 'Holy, Holy, Holy' framed their biblical picture of God. For others, 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' expressed the heart of their faith. It was clear to me, even then, in how they sang and how they talked about God, that hymns carried much of their theology." Music traditions of the past and more recent hymn writers, contemporary worship artists, and recent "secular" songwriters are expressing and exploring deeply religious questions that can be included in bible studies, classes, and devotions.

How do leaders in faith formation incorporate paraphrases of hymns, psalms, contemporary Christian music into their lessons and activities? How do leaders find new mediums to enhance studies and continue to promote singing communities? Music is not in competition with lessons, but instead can be viewed as a spice to transform your lesson in a deeply spiritual and powerful way. Below are just a few resources to empower lay and professional leaders to find new and engaging tools to incorporate in their settings:

- **Explore the Index in the Back of Hymnals**  
Take some time to explore the back indexes of the hymnals. [Glory to God](#) hymnal offers a Topical Index, Lectionary Index, Scriptural Index, and Psalm Index. Each of these providing extra ideas that complement the [Call to Worship Lectionary Aid](#), published by the Office of Theology and Worship of the PCUSA.
- **Consider a Hymn Emphasis with a Study Series**  
If one is doing a series, consider choosing a hymn with multiple verses and starting with one each week. If one is talking about what the church is today and how does it function an example could be to unpack one verse of *Let Us Build a House* each week. Either play it, sing a cappella, find a version on YouTube, or purchase the digital *Glory to God* hymnal. Then consider including it during worship to add a greater and deeper spiritual connection.

- **Look to the [History of Hymns](#)** - UMC Discipleship Ministries  
Consider uncovering the history of hymns and what drove the author/composer to write music that is still enhancing worship today. Learning the inspiration for hymns and how others describe each hymn can aid in your interpretation and teaching. It is written currently by Dr. Michael Hawn.
- **Think about Contemporary Christian Music**  
[Praisecharts](#) is one resource that includes devotionals based on songs. It is a free resource and provides ways of paraphrasing the lyrics in support of the devotional theme. Search for devotionals in the search bar. Or look to music that is considered secular but which has text that speaks to faith topics. You can even ask participants for songs that connect on a theme or faith question.
- **Find more in [Using Music as the Basis of Faith Formation](#)**  
This Quicksheet by Dr. Joshua Taylor includes an abundance of additional resources.

Trust your interpretation and connection. It can absolutely be unnerving to venture into using a new tool for teaching but trust yourself and find confidence in the connection you have to the songs and lesson. By adding musical paraphrases into lessons and activities, you are equipping those in our faith communities to go out in the world with a tune or a pertinent message, through song or rhyming scheme that they can carry with them until you meet again.

Additional Quicksheets and other resources can be found at [Presbyterian Association of Musicians](#).

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